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ABSTRACT

Introducing architectural concepts to children is a relatively new area of the curriculum for schools, whether elementary schools or high schools. The use of picture books and creative dramatics to encourage children to think about architecture is explored. In a few hours, a fourth-grade class considered the destruction and rebuilding of a cathedral, using picture books, postulating ideas about construction, and engaging in creative dramatics to represent their ideas. Selected picture books introduced building as concept, form, function, and culture; style and structure; construction; and imaginative participation. Dramatic activities centered on rebuilding a Gothic cathedral, with a final dramatic enactment. Using the dual lens of picture books and dramatics linked art, architecture, and a representation of different cultures for these children. A 63-item bibliography is included. (Contains 9 references.) (SLD)

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Architectural Images Through the Dual Lens of Picture Books and Creative Dramatics

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INTRODUCTION

Introducing architectural concepts to children is a relatively new area of the curriculum for schools, whether they be elementary schools or high schools. It is true that school children have looked at photographs of the Parthenon in art or history classes; perhaps they have learned how to differentiate the forms of the classic Greek columns—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian. In most cases the knowledge that was gained was isolated from experience. The idea of architecture as a meaningful and vitally important part of the student's environment was not present.

Curriculum Integration of Architecture Education

What is new today is the integration of architecture education into history, mathematics, and other subject areas. Several curriculum projects dealing with architecture and design or architecture and the environment were developed in the 1980's with the help of professional societies. The American Institute of Architects has been involved in elementary and secondary education since 1966, "working nationwide to help clarify issues and develop methods and materials for raising public consciousness." (Sandler, 1989, p. 13). Their program, "Learning by Design," provides resources to assist teachers and students in gaining a better understanding of the factors that shape environments. Students develop an awareness and appreciation of the environment and skill in visual thinking and decision making, as well as mastery of program content (Sandler, 1989).

Programs and workshops ("Teach the Teachers") sponsored by the American Institute of Architects, have been conducted in Missouri, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, North Carolina, and other states. These "familiarize teachers with basic concepts about the Built Environment" (Graves and Graves, 1989). In Illinois, Project Archi-Teacher was designed to assist teachers in implementing design education in the curriculum. Olsen speaks of the enthusiasm of teachers in the workshops and the reluctance she sometimes observed to using the workshop activities and resources in the classroom. "Why is it that elementary teachers are so reluctant to teach design concepts, although few stop to worry that they are not astronomers before they introduce students to the sun and planets?" (Olsen, 1989, p. 23).

This interest in the appropriateness of architecture as a subject for school study is not limited to the United States but is echoed in other countries such as Great Britain and Australia. A British project, "Learning to See," studied work in the schools which, based on environmental experience, was intended to develop: aesthetic and design awareness; a feeling response to place; discriminatory and critical skills; and design ability which was concerned with shaping the environment and

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dealing with change (Adams, 1989, p. 183).

A Framework for Architecture Education

A useful framework for thinking about architecture is found in Willey's discussion of architectural design education.

> Architecture can be perceived as comprising two distinct design traditions; building as concept and building as construction. On the one hand the building is seen as the realisation of a set of ideas about the philosophy of beauty, symbology and the nature of space, human interaction and place. On the other the building is an assembly of materials that are jointed, finished and positioned to protect and promote human activity. (Willey, 1989, p. 15)

An introduction to these concepts can be made to elementary school children while older students would deal with them in greater detail and complexity.

While it is desirable to have an extended period of time to consider architecture and its links to environment and culture, it is also possible to provide an effective experience in a shorter space of time. This paper will discuss the use of picture books and creative dramatics to encourage children to think about architecture. In just a few hours, a fourth grade class considered the destruction and rebuilding of a cathedral, examining picture books, postulating ideas about construction, and engaging in creative dramatics to represent their ideas

PICTURE BOOKS

Some picture books deal directly with architecture— with drawing plans, examining the techniques of building, looking at the materials which go into the building— these are aspects of building as construction. The other aspect, building as concept, considers the attractiveness or aesthetics of the building, and the interaction with people, space, and place (Willey, 1989).

Building As Concept

Many of the children's books reviewed deal with the aspect of concept in the manner in which Frank Lloyd Wright defined architecture. In his 1939 book, *An Organic Architecture*, Wright stated,

> I know that architecture is life, or at least it is life itself taking form and therefore it is the truest record of life as it was lived in the world yesterday, as it is lived today or ever will be lived.... Architecture is that living creative Spirit which from generation to generation, from age to age, proceeds, persists, creates, according to the nature of man, and his circumstances as they change. (quoted in Maddex, 1985, "Opening")

Form and Function and Culture

An excellent example of this record of life is Philip Isaacson's 1988 *Round Buildings, Square Buildings, and Buildings That Wiggle Like A Fish*. He describes through his photographs and his writing how various elements create the mood and character, personality and harmony found in buildings. He shows us how function is often the same, but is represented quite differently by numerous forms. Isaacson has compiled a visual collection of architectural styles which span the ages and the world.

Style can also be examined in *The House I Live In*. This is an introduction to types of dwellings in various geographical regions of the United States. The author explains why people built houses where they did and in the style in which they did: adobe homes in New

Mexico, stone homes in Pennsylvania, Victorian homes, log cabins, trailers, and houseboats. A history of the dwelling, the reason for the design, and an update on the buildings' changes make this book a good inspiration for children to take a closer look at the houses in which they live.

Both of these books could be used as springboards when exploring architectural style. Why are certain styles popular at certain times? Why do styles vary from place to place? Children can produce a photographic record of their homes and prominent buildings in the community to make a classroom book describing various local architectural styles. These images will help children understand the reasons for the structures: the form, the function, the placement within their town or city.

By being sensitized to style and form and function of structure, children may more easily see that who we are as a culture is mirrored in our surroundings. Through picture books on architecture, children can see representations of their cultures and their world. Children can hypothesize, examine, and inquire about the logic behind the buildings. Why is that building so tall? Why is it so ornate? What has kept that building from falling? What do buildings have in common? Who might live in this building?

Many cultures can be explored through architecture. *Houses and Homes* is a photographic picture book of dwellings and people who inhabit those dwellings throughout the world. With a minimum of words the author describes the size of houses, the materials of which some houses are made, and the ingredient needed to make a house a home: love. The index of *Houses and Homes* catalogs the photographs found on each page, designates the country in which the photo was taken and presents a one sentence description of the scene. The map on the last page documents the country in which each photo was taken.

Another book which looks at the various cultures through the style and structure of houses is *This Is My House*. This 1992 publication presents an illustration of a house on each page, lists the country in which the house is located, and gives several sentences about materials in the house or the location of the house. What is unique about this book is that the sentence "This is my house" is repeated on each page in English and in the language of the country whose dwelling is being featured on that page.

Style and Structure

Children can discover changes in buildings closer to home in books like *Since 1920* and *New Providence: A Changing Cityscape*. These books present pictorial histories of a neighborhood and a city. They help children understand how buildings reflect the ideas, values, and events of the times during which they were built, how their surroundings and, subsequently, the function of these buildings change or stay the same. *Since 1920* shows the evolution of a family's home and neighborhood from a bungalow in the country to a used-furniture store in the city. The neighborhood gradually develops through the 1940's, the city begins to reach into the neighborhood in the 1950's, the area becomes run down in the 1960's and 1970's, and urban renewal takes place in the 1980's. Children can see the progression from open field to crowded neighborhood and can look for changes in the structure and function of the buildings. Children can examine and question those changes. What factors in our society influence changes? How are these changes for the better? How are they not for the better?

New Providence: A Changing Cityscape depicts an imaginary city from 1910 to 1987 and describes how the buildings serve various functions with the demand of the times. The authors and illustrator have compiled visual images of buildings found throughout the United States to create this city. Perhaps children could become involved in designing a city of

their own and describing the importance of each of their buildings.

Victoria House is a story about a deserted Victorian style house which is given life and becomes a home again when it is moved to the city, repaired, and refurbished. Perhaps this book could be used in a lesson in preservation and renewal or even on recycling.

Building As Construction

The other aspect of architecture, that of building as construction, is presented in a variety of books. Often books featuring construction are used as the stepping stones to books that deal with the concept of architecture or with books that incorporate aspects of construction and concept within the same book.

How Things Were Built is an illustrated history of notable structures of the ancient and modern world. It is a catalog of illustrations, architectural diagrams, and terminology. Each double page is filled with the various stages of construction of a structure and the description of the process. Several inserts appear on the page with additional information on a particular detail of the structure. For example, on the pages depicting the Theater at Epidamus, two inserts, one on Greek Engineers and the other on Tools are featured along with information about the plan, the stage, and the construction. Terms such as the "theatron," "orchestra," "skene," and "acoustics" are highlighted. The definitions of those terms are found in the glossary at the end of the book.

Grand Constructions is another book which focuses on the historical progression of architecture. Information is presented in a large format with finely detailed illustrations of the finished structures. This would be a good companion book to use with *How Things Were Built. Grand Constructions* emphasizes the background information about the structures while *How Things Were Built* focuses on the detail of the act of construction.

Houses of Hide and Earth, one of a series on Native dwellings by Bonnie Shemie is a straightforward account of the shelters, the tipi and the earthlodge, made by the Plains Indians. Materials for the shelters are described, the symbolism of the shapes of the shelters is explained, and black and white line drawings showing the process of putting up a tipi and building an earthlodge are presented. Diagrams show us the various parts of the shelters and placement of the materials used. Several colored pictorial spreads are interspersed throughout the book, but the major part of the text and illustrations concentrates on the construction of the shelters.

Gail Gibbons is an author/illustrator known for her basic informational books for children. Her *Up Goes the Skyscraper* is a step by step account of the construction of a skyscraper from the initial plan to the finished structure. Throughout the book, she highlights words which are important in the process and defines the terms through illustration. We see the "city inspector" and the "building permit," the "pile drivers" and "anchor bolts," etc. Terms such as "wind load" and "columns" are explained in the text as well as through the illustration.

The aspect of construction can be found in books that don't necessarily purport to be books on architecture. To interest young children in thinking about architecture, familiar stories can be used. Some critical thinking and problem solving might go along with finding out why the three little pigs had such trouble in keeping their houses together. Why did one building remain while the others were destroyed? What might the children try for building materials?

The House That Jack Built is a classic cumulative tale that many children are introduced to along with other Mother Goose rhymes. A traditional version could be compared to architect Robert A. M. Stern's 1991 rendition, *The House That Bob Built*. In this interpretation, the author visually introduces children to the

layout of the house as well as to ideas about light and space in each room of his extraordinary house which he has built by the sea. Could the children write their own stories about their houses?

Imaginative Participation

Introducing children to style and detail through the alphabet is also a way to encourage children to look more closely at what they see. *Archabet* is a collection of photographs that invites the reader to discover the letter shapes within the visual. Although this book contains fairly sophisticated quotes about architecture by prominent individuals (authors, statesmen, architects), the photographs can easily be the focus for discovery for young children. After finding the letter shapes in the photographs, children might enjoy a walk around the neighborhood searching for letters hidden in buildings which are familiar to them.

Another alphabet book, *Architects Make Zigzags: Looking at Architecture* presents architectural terminology, a brief description, and a line drawing of an example of the term for each letter of the alphabet. For example, "R" is for roof, "S" is for style, "T" is for tower, etc.

Many books that deal with the aspect of construction present detailed illustrations that invite imaginative participation from the viewer. The author of *The Truth About Castles* explains castle architectural terminology, design, purpose, and uses of castles in detailed full page visual spreads. The various areas within the castle are described: motte and tower, the keep, the inner courtyard, etc. An additional storyline carried on by the characters within the illustrations accompanies the explanatory text. The added detail allows the reader to search through and examine all parts of the illustration.

This book is a good example of looking from the inside out to understand the way something functions. Author-illustrator David Macaulay addresses this in his 1988 Horn Book Award speech. He says,

> In studying architecture, I learned to see things from the inside out. I learned that the form, the look, of a building, a product, or a natural object develops in response to one or more functions. I learned that there is usually some logical connection between what something does and the way it looks and that understanding the way something looks can often help us understand what it does. (Macaulay, 1990, p. 25)

Structures from the Inside Out

Macaulay's book, *Cathedral: The Story of Its Construction* illustrates his belief. Detailed diagrams of the inside of a cathedral are interspersed throughout the book as the story of a town's dedication to build their cathedral is told. Macaulay's commentary presents the terminology of cathedral building, introducing children to flying buttresses, gargoyles, vaults, and keystones in a narrative which chronicles the construction.

Another book which examines the building of cathedrals is *The Cathedral Builders*, one in a series of books on Peoples of the Past. This book describes the construction of Gothic cathedrals and also the significance they had in the lives of those who built them. Detailed, colored maps and illustrations depict the locations and construction stages of these structures. Parts of the cathedrals are featured as well as information on those who worked at the sites. Both this book and Macaulay's feature a glossary of terms for the reader.

The 1992 publication *Stephen Biesty's Incredible Cross-Sections* is a compilation of cut-away illustrations of various buildings and machines. This book exemplifies the idea of looking from the inside out. The buildings and machines are dissected to reveal their hidden

parts. An ocean liner, a car factory, an opera house, a coal mine, a castle, and a cathedral are a few of the structures that are featured. In examining the Cathedral pages, children can find out in detail about twenty-six different parts of the structure: the nave, the maze, the crypt, etc. Additional information about a specific cathedral and the people who worked on the construction also is presented. Pertinent statistics such as length, volume, etc. as well as scale, are given for the other various buildings and machines.

There is a variety of activities which can be designed around these books. Many of them or just a few can be used to develop a theme. For example, how could a teacher use Macaulay's *Cathedral* in a classroom, incorporating illustrations to understand form and function? How can several books on cathedrals and life during the middle ages invite imaginative participation from students? How can students come to understand the times and cultures of others? How can a teacher provide an experience to extend the visual? Using five books: *Cathedral: The Story of Its Construction*, *The Cathedral Builders*, *The Luttrell Village: Country Life in the Middle Ages*, *Stephen Biesty's Incredible Cross-Sections*, and *What It Feels Like to Be a Building*, a fourth grade class in Columbus, Ohio shows us how these questions can be answered.

DRAMATICS

Phase One: Building the Dramatic World

A group of fourth grade students participated in drama activities, centered on rebuilding a Gothic cathedral, which enabled them to understand the construction and conceptual aspects of architecture in more vivid ways. The teacher began by saying, "The next time I speak to you I will speak in role."

And she continued by saying, "As you know, we have had a terrible disaster and many buildings in our town have been destroyed." After discussing the disaster the teacher showed the children a picture of a cathedral and continued, "The symbol of our hope, our cathedral, has been completely destroyed." This was followed by questions and discussion that emphasized the importance of the cathedral in their lives.

The teacher added that the architects had guaranteed that the cathedral would not be destroyed by such a storm as they had experienced. She continued, "What then went wrong?" When the students were asked if they were willing to find out what had happened to their cathedral and rebuild it, all hands were enthusiastically raised.

When the drama began, many of the students had no idea what a cathedral was. Some of them, drawing on what they knew, thought it was a castle. The initial drama activity then helped the students build their concept of cathedrals. Like the original cathedral, it became for them a place that bound them together as a community and served as a symbol of their hope.

Aspects of construction, including form and function, were considered when they looked at the picture of their cathedral and when they discussed how it functioned in their lives through such rituals as baptism and marriage. The aspect of construction was deepened in the second phase of the drama as the students gathered research and postulated theories as to why the cathedral collapsed.

Phase Two: Using Picture Books

At this point the teacher sent the students, in their roles as villagers, down into the archives of the cathedral to investigate. The students took clipboards, paper, and pencils and went out into various sections of the drama room where books and pictures dealing with cathedrals had been placed. These books included: *Cathedral: The Story of Its Construction* by David Macaulay; *The Cathedral Builders* by

Marie-Pierre Perdrizet; and *The Luttrell Village: Country Life in the Middle Ages* by Sheila Sancha. Students worked in groups and pairs and looked at the pictures, hypothesizing reasons for the collapse of the cathedral. Some wrote facts and ideas, some drew pictures, some gathered in groups to compare and contrast what they had found, and others discussed their ideas with the teacher.

After spending twenty minutes on this activity, the students were called to a meeting to share what they had found. Every child had her/his own theory about the disaster. Some thought that the builders had used faulty materials, others thought that buttresses had not been used in the final construction, and one boy, after looking at the wooden framework illustrated in his picture, said, "I think it was termites."

This activity focused on the construction aspects of cathedral building. By being in role as villagers the students had a reason to look carefully and critically at various illustrations and pictures of cathedrals. They were adding to their understanding of various aspects of architecture by creating a dramatic context for looking at and responding to these pictures.

Phase Three: What It Feels Like to Be a Building

At this point in the drama the teacher said she had found a sealed box that contained some mysterious pictures. She opened the box and took out several illustrations and passed them to the children saying, "What could this mean? I don't understand!" The pictures were from the book *What It Feels Like to Be a Building* by Forrest Wilson. They show various aspects of cathedrals such as columns, arches, and buttresses using human or animal bodies to represent the shapes. The children chose four of these illustrations and, working in small groups, created an improvisational dream which responded to what they had seen.

One group used the picture of a buttress and acted out what happens when buttresses are removed. Members of this group enjoyed falling dramatically to the ground. Another group used a picture of the Gothic arches in front of a cathedral. They then positioned themselves on chairs with their arms extended to represent the arches. As they moved into position they chanted:

> We must build a cathedral.
> We must build a cathedral.
> Let's build a cathedral.
> This time it will stay.
> This time it will stay.

By physically involving the students, this activity intensified their understanding of the construction aspects of cathedrals. They became the building and felt what the building felt such as the stress on the arches and the support of the buttresses.

Phase Four: The Ritual

At the end of the drama the children formed a circle and the teacher narrated that they would begin to rebuild their cathedral by repairing the stained glass window. This was to become a symbol of hope and help them face the task of rebuilding the rest of their cathedral. Listening to a recording of a medieval chant, the students ceremoniously taped colored tissue paper to the windows in the arched doorway of the classroom.

At this point the conceptual and construction aspects of the building became inseparable. The children were not only physically engaged in making a window, but in a ritual that symbolically represented the importance of community and hope. When the children reflected on what they were grateful for, they focused on the importance of working together and not losing faith.

Their cathedral had become more than a building; it was a place that bound them together.

Heathcote writes,

> ...to go beneath the outer form to the inner meanings.... This leads to the understanding of the significance of rituals, to the seeking for the nature of objects as well as the shapes of objects. It gives unity to experiences. It finds form everywhere, from the momentous form in buildings towering in space to the movements of a child in play. (Johnson, 1984, p. 33)

By the same token, this drama experience added to the children's understanding of architecture by actively engaging them in its concept and its construction.

SUMMARY

Educators today are broadening the ways they think about the nature of thinking and learning. What does it mean to know? How can what one knows be represented? These are questions being examined in the light of what Eisner (1989) calls the "new psychology." Human thinking and intelligence are processed in multiple ways, some dependent on language and some related to a more intuitive and aesthetic sense. Involving children in creative dramatics and interaction with picture books enhances learning through language and aesthetic experience. Looking through the dual lens of picture books and creative dramatics for the study of architecture served to link art, architecture, and a representation of different cultures for the children who took part in these events.

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